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Crime Panel Head Qualifies Support For Drug Testing

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WASHINGTON—In the face of sharp congressional and public criticism, the head of the President's Commission on Organized Crime toned down his panel's recommendations for widespread drug testing of military and civilian government employees and federal contractors.

Federal Appeals Court Judge Irving R. Kaufman, who was appointed by President Reagan to chair the commission, said in an interview yesterday that the group's original recommendations weren't intended to urge across-the-board drug tests for millions of workers.

Acknowledging that he was surprised by the public outcry against the recommendations, Judge Kaufman said such testing should be "used very selectively" and only in "appropriate cases" where

"policy and guidelines have been clearly laid down" to protect privacy and other Constitutional rights.

The commission's report, which was released Monday, didn't spell out such limits and controls. "We should have clarified it," the judge said.

Judge Kaufman said that "everything else has failed" to curb what the commission called the country's "voracious" appetite for illegal drugs. "So let's talk about testing" as a way to help solve the problem, he urged.

Attorney General Edwin Meese also appeared to qualify his support for drug testing. During a news conference with Judge Kaufman, he said it would be "a very reasonable step" to require such testing before many government employees are hired. But Mr. Meese said the Reagan administration wants carefully to evaluate and "balance" the usefulness of widespread testing against its "impact (on) and acceptance by employees."

Mr. Meese's comments came as criticism mounted against the commission's proposal for extensive testing. Rep. Peter Rodino (D., N.J.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, said drug testing might be a good idea in some industries and government agencies, but he said he

"strongly disagreed with the report's sweeping recommendations" because "wholesale testing is unwarranted and raises serious civil liberty concerns."

Mr. Meese also had a lukewarm reaction to other commission recommendations calling for significantly stepped-up efforts by the Pentagon to identify and stop drug smugglers. He said the current system of limited military "support and assistance" to civilian drug enforcement agents, which mainly involves exchanging radar and intelligence information, is adequate. The Pentagon shouldn't get directly involved in law enforcement activities, he said.

The Defense Department opposes greater military involvement too. Mr. Meese, however, noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff are evaluating proposals for some modest expansion of military anti-drug efforts.